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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001949

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/FO, AF/W, AF/RSA, DRL, INR/AA, ELAB;
USAID FOR AFR/WA (DALZOUA);
LABOR FOR SHALEY

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SUBJECT: NIGERIAN NUGGETS -- OCTOBER 23, 2009

REF: A. ABUJA 1943
[1](#)B. ABUJA 1884

Classified By: Political Counselor James P. McNulty
for reasons in Sections 1.4 (B) and (D)

[1](#)1. (U) Mission Nigeria provides the following compilation of recent political, economic, and social developments not previously reported.

ELECTORAL REFORM HEARINGS

[1](#)2. (C) The Senate Constitutional Review Subcommittee held public hearings in Abuja October 13 to 15 on proposed electoral reform constitutional amendments. Participants advocated adoption of all or most amendments proposed by the Electoral Reform Commission chaired by former Chief Justice Uwais. Witnesses agreed on the need for financial independence of the Independent National Electoral Commission. Senate leaders expressed optimism to PolOff that the National Assembly would soon approve the less contentious amendments. Subsequently, former Lagos Governor Bola Tinubu led a 16-person delegation to the Embassy October 22 to discuss electoral reform. (We will report details separately.)

NIGERIAN FOOD SECURITY

[1](#)3. (U) The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Nigeria Director called October 15 for more public-private partnerships in commercial farming to boost food production in Nigeria at the 2009 World Food Symposium in Nasarawa State. He noted sharp increases in global food prices and their affect on Nigeria, the second largest importer of rice in the world. He highlighted U.S. assistance to boost Nigerian agri-business through the USAID Maximizing Agricultural Revenue and Key Enterprises in Target Sites (MARKETS) project, designed to help farmers reverse a 20-year downward trend in rice production. About 100,000 farmers in the program increased their average annual average yield from 1.5 tons per hectare in 2004 to 5.2 metric tons due to improved access to quality seed, fertilizer, and use of improved farming practices. The MARKETS program helps

farmers to boost cassava, cowpea, sorghum, sesame seed, and aquaculture production and obtain resources from other partners, including the Benue State Government, Olam Nigeria (rice processors), Notore Chemical Industries (fertilizer), First Bank, and Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation, all of which play important roles in developing commercial agriculture in Nigeria.

VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT ANTI-POLIO EFFORTS

14. (U) Twelve Mission volunteers from USAID and CDC supported GON efforts to eradicate polio October 10 to 14 in response to the U.S. President's call for community service to mark a Day of Remembrance of September 11. Staff served as "independent monitors" for the "Immunization Plus Days" conducted several times annually for children under the age of five at fixed immunization posts and via mobile teams that visit schools, markets, houses, and gathering places. The volunteers monitored activities and helped supervision teams on immunization days or conducted post-immunization checks. Qon immunization days or conducted post-immunization checks. The program immunized over 645,000 children during five days.

TWO KILLED DURING PROTEST OVER CRASH HELMETS

15. (U) Two men died October 18 when hit by bullets fired by police during a confrontation between motorcycle riders

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(known locally as "okadas") and police in Biu, Borno State, during a protest over the use of crash helmets. Many other injuries reportedly occurred during the fracas, which resulted in the burning down of part of the police headquarters when youth protested government attempts to require use of crash helmets. The initially peaceful demonstration involving over 100 motorcycle riders erupted into violence as the crowd also protested against state government inaction after a cholera outbreak killed over 100 persons in Biu and neighboring villages. The State Governor curtailed his appearance after he heard of the protests.

LABOR MOVEMENT DISUNITED OVER DEREGULATION

16. (U) The Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) Deputy President told the press October 29 that deregulation was "out of fashion" worldwide and the GON had a duty to intervene in the petroleum sector by subsidizing prices for citizens. Unlike the NLC, Nigeria's other large umbrella union, the Trade Union Congress (TUC), informed the GON of its conditional approval of deregulation. The NLC represents the petroleum sector's blue-collar unions, whose members will more acutely feel the impact of deregulation than counterparts at the higher-paid TUC-affiliated, white-collar petroleum unions.

ORGANIZED LABOR THREATENS MULTIPLE STRIKES

17. (U) Ekiti State civil servants threatened to strike to demand immediate payment of arrears in salaries and monetized allowances. NLC and TUC local council chairpersons criticized Ekiti Governor Segun Oni, accusing him and his followers of collecting huge salaries and allowances while failing to pay workers. Labor leaders accused Oni of allocating state funds to unfinished contracts totaling over 17 million dollars and warned that a state-wide protest would ensue if workers failed to receive their owed salaries and allowances. The Ekiti strike warning follows threats of a nationwide strike in Nigeria's health sector. More than five

unions representing nurses, midwives, pharmacists, and other health professionals and administrators in public clinics and hospitals across the country have demanded that the GON pay arrears in monetized benefits promised in 2003. Similarly, the judiciary workers union has threatened to strike over unfair salary structures and benefits. These threatened strikes now push the number of actual or threatened strikes above one dozen since January 2009.

POLITICAL THEATER

¶8. (U) Mission Nigeria's Political and Public Diplomacy (PD) Sections recently collaborated in hosting U.S. playwright and actor Dan Hoyle to perform his critically acclaimed, "Tings Dey Happen" from October 6 to 13 in Calabar, Lagos, Bauchi, Jos, and Abuja. The performances focused on oil politics in the Niger Delta, where Hoyle conducted research as a Fulbright Scholar in 2005 and 2006. He visited Nigeria under QFulbright Scholar in 2005 and 2006. He visited Nigeria under the auspices of the Strategic Speakers Initiative. Audiences in all five cities praised Hoyle's performance and U.S. sponsorship.

SOCIAL MEDIA SPUR PEACEFUL PROTEST

¶9. (U) The DayStar Christian Center in Ikeja, Lagos, organized a peaceful protest involving some 10,000 persons October 19 against the monopoly held by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN). Marchers called upon the GON to allow private investors and state governments to generate electricity. LightUpNigeria, an organization started on Facebook and Twitter, helped with volunteers, publicity, and promotion of general awareness. Volunteer Ronke Nedd filed a Cable News Network (CNN) i-Report on the march. The

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organization issued a statement that they were "encouraged and humbled by the leadership shown by the people of DayStar Church" and "looking to encourage similar actions from other communities and organizations in Nigeria."

"MUTINY" OFFICERS FORCED TO RETIRE

¶10. (U) The Nigerian Army forced into retirement four officers implicated in the July 2008 "mutiny" by 27 Nigerian soldiers who peacefully protested the withholding of their stipends following their deployment with UN peacekeeping forces in Liberia. While not admitting that the officers had committed illegal acts, the Army said the officers had committed "acts of negligence unbecoming officers of their status." In the meantime, the 27 soldiers originally sentenced to life in prison, continued to serve their seven-year prison terms.

U.S.-UK ROUNDTABLE

¶11. (C) Political, Economic, Military, and Development officers from the U.S. and UK Missions in Abuja met October 20 for a round-table discussion of developments in northern Nigeria, military cooperation, coverage of upcoming elections, corruption, Niger Delta, and the Petroleum Industry Bill. Participants agreed to share information and analyses, coordinate on public messaging, and work jointly on travel and outreach. (We will report details separately.)

AIDS, TB, AND MALARIA GRANTS TO NIGERIA

¶12. (U) The Nigeria Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB, and Malaria Country Coordinating Mechanism (GFATM CCM) signed three grants October 20 to permit disbursement of some 669 million dollars during five years. The grants will support HIV/AIDS Health System Strengthening (HSS), malaria, and TB efforts in Nigeria. Former Head of State General Yakubu Gowon chaired the event, while Health Minister Babatunde Osotimehin served as guest of honor. Although invited, the Finance and National Planning Ministers did not attend. GFATM representatives Fareed Abdalla and Christa Arent, who participated in the ceremony, committed an extra three million dollars to the HSS grant, specifically for the Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV/AIDS. For the first time, the Health Ministry a Principal Recipient of a GFATM malaria grant, the largest such grant awarded to any country.

NBA IN NIGERIA

¶13. (U) Embassy Abuja and CG Lagos PD personnel met recently with National Basketball Association (NBA) Senior Director for International Basketball Operations Brooks Meek, NBA Vice President for Events and Attractions Mark Aronson, and former Nigerian-born NBA player and current Toronto Raptors Assistant Manager Masai Ujiri. The NBA seeks to improve and expand basketball through clinics and camps in Nigeria in 2011 after it has identified a corporate sponsor. In 2005, the Department collaborated with NBA and Reebok to organize basketball unity camps coordinated by Nigerian-born NBA star Qbasketball unity camps coordinated by Nigerian-born NBA star Obinna Ekezie for Nigerian high school students in Abuja and Lagos.

¶14. (U) Embassy and ConGen Lagos collaborated on this telegram.

SANDERS